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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: ARAB LEAGUE TO CONTINUE CONFIDENCE BUILDING BEFORE
SCHEDULING BAGHDAD CONFERENCE

Classified by ECPO Counselor Catherine Hill-Herndon for
reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Arab League Chief of Staff Hesham Youssef said that although participants at the late July Iraq Reconciliation Preparatory Conference made progress on divisive issues, reconciliation will be a long process and circumstances, including security, are not yet conducive to scheduling the Baghdad Reconciliation Conference. The League will be implementing several confidence building initiatives, Youssef added, in an effort both to outline a plan for agreement on agenda items and to enlarge participation and enhance communication at the next conference, which will likely take place in the fall. He also said that while the lack of all groups' participation at the July meeting was disappointing, the communication among those who came was much improved from the first Preparatory Conference in November 2005. Al Maliki's recent discussion of troop deployments to Baghdad was not particularly problematic at the conference because many conference participants acknowledge the need to address increasing violence in the capital. End summary.

¶2. (C) Arab League Chief of Staff Hesham Youssef said that at the late July Iraq Reconciliation Preparatory Conference, participants agreed to focus on confidence building among all Iraqi groups before scheduling a reconciliation conference in Baghdad. Refuting press allegations that the conference had been a failure because participants did not set a date for the Baghdad meeting, Youssef said reconciliation would be a long process, but the groups are improving their communication with each meeting. Issues such as protocol, seating arrangements, and speaking order, all of which were complex and sensitive at the November 2005 conference, were "non-issues" at the most recent gathering, Youssef offered. The key now, Youssef explained, will be to devise ways to diffuse tension among the groups on a routine basis, rather than waiting to do this at League-sponsored conferences outside of Iraq. To this end, Youssef said that participants agreed to use the League's representative in Baghdad as an intermediary. This will allow them to vent their suspicions and address damaging behavior without delay.

¶3. (C) Youssef downplayed the Sadrists' lack of participation, noting only that there is still much work to be done before the Reconciliation Conference can take place in Baghdad. The aim, he said, will be to increase communication among groups, via e-mail if necessary, because they cannot meet in Baghdad. Youssef also said the participants formed a committee of Shiite and Sunni leaders that will work to end the use of religious sites and fora to incite violence. While cautioning that he did not want to sound overly optimistic, Youssef said he believes that participation at the next League-sponsored meeting will be greater. Before the next meeting, the League will also coordinate among all groups to craft an action plan for each item on the agenda for the Reconciliation Conference. The plan will outline the steps and major impediments to reaching

agreement on key issues.

14. (C) Security in Baghdad, Youssef said, must also improve before a conference can take place there. Al Maliki's recent reference to troop deployments in Baghdad was not a major topic of discussion, he added, noting that many Iraqis are suspicious of local forces and trust only U.S. troops. Youssef said he believes most groups participating in the conference understand that reconciliation is about a process, not a conference, and that it will take time.
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